The basic unit of the Chinese language is the zi (字), i.e. a Chinese word. Each zi has a written form (called a character, made up of strokes), a sound (made up of consonant and vowel) and a meaning (or multiple meanings). When we speak or write Chinese, we string zi together to form terms, phrases and sentences.

In Putonghua (the spoken form of Modern Standard Chinese) each zi is pronounced in one of four tones:

1st tone: 1 = diacritical mark — pitch: 5 to 5, highest prolonged
2nd tone: 2 = diacritical mark / pitch: 3 to 5, middle to high
3rd tone: 3 = diacritical mark U pitch: 2 to 1 to 4, low to lowest to high
4th tone: 4 = diacritical mark \ pitch: 5 to 1, highest to lowest

To pronounce each zi below, follow its pinyin and the given tone number. Light-sound words, which have no definite pitch, carry no diacritical mark and are marked by 0.

This week: Words about Narcissus

Putonghua pronunciation: lian4
Cantonese pronunciation: luen2
Meanings: love, endearment, attachment, unwillingness to forget, leave, abandon

戀 (radical 心 xin1, heart) means 依戀 (yi1 lian4 = lean-love = emotional attachment): 戀家 (lian4 jia1 = love-home = love staying home), 初戀 (chu4 lian4 = first-love), 戀人 (lian4 ren2 = love-person = lover). Man and woman 談戀愛 (tan2 lian4 ai4 = talk-endear-love = date/have love relationship).

Tough politician 戀棈 (lian4 zhan4 = love-inn/post = won't step down), 戀戰 (lian4 zhan4 = love-battle = continues fighting/battling others). 同性戀 (tong2 xing4 lian4 = same-sex-love) = homosexuality/lesbianism. 戀物狂 (lian4 wu4 kuang2 = love-objects-madness) = erotic fetishism.

Echo 單戀 (dan4 lian4 = one-way-love = unrequitedly loves) Narcissus, who 痴戀 (chi1 lian4 = madly-loves) his own reflection. 自戀狂 (zi4 lian4 kuang2 = self-love-madness) = narcissism.

by Diana Yue